

THE KORAN AND PLURALISM

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The world is changing rapidly. These changes influence us Muslims as well. Let me say that our failures in the past were mainly due to our indifference to the changes around and in us. Religious life is not outside the process of change I want to challenge my young theological candidates in particular to be more alert and more sensitive to developments in the world Since our task is to understand and to explain Quranic truth to the world we can not ignore the world's changes and developments In this article, I will try to deal with one recent development which will eventually affect us pluralism.

Today there are good signs of integration in the common human legacy. This process can be traced in social sciences, philosophy, sociology, and technology. Now theologians have the responsibility to translate the religious heritage of humanity for the purpose of integration with the rest of the world, to help create a better world.

We are living in a world at a time in which peace and cooperation are praised highly. Can we speak to this world with a "Dâr al-Kufr/Dâr al-Islam" classification? Can we speak to this world saying that four billion will go to Hell? That Allah is merciless to them? Can we speak to the world saying that all are wrong and wicked. But we are right and blessed? How can we claim to transform the world when we isolate ourselves from it? Can we bring peace to the world by coercion and by war?

PLURALISM

What Is Pluralism?

Pluralism, particularly religious pluralism, is the name of the theological position or religious attitude toward world religions. It is a philosophy which requires theo-centeredness, or God Allah-centeredness, in one's position toward reality.

There is an attitude which says, I am true; I have the only truth. My religion is the best, last, perfect religion. My religion is the only religion. My religion is the center of all religions. I have the truth but others do not. I have the truth but others have it only partially. My reli-

gion is the true religion but others' are false religions. There is only one truth and that is with me. God Allah is with me. My God Allah is the true God Allah and others' are false gods. God Allah's message is revealed in and through my religion once and for all. All good is due to my religion. Logically, there can be only one reality, one true religion, and that is my religion. Consequently, there is only one way to salvation, and that is through my religion. All must embrace my religion. All must convert to my way.

These sentences exhibit a psychology and theology commonly found in all of the world's religious traditions. Such a position is called "exclusivism". This attitude to one's own religion and to other religions is absolutist, exclusivist, and triumphalist. It is egocentric.

In the exclusivist mindset, a member of a particular religious tradition asks himself and others such questions as, why do others not participate in my religious life or community? A Muslim, for example, says, why are people not all Muslims? Why don't they come to the mosque? Why don't they fast as I do? Why don't they confess the formula: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is the last Prophet? Why don't they go on the pilgrimage to Mecca? Why don't they love Allah and Muhammad? Why don't they love and respect Islamic history? Why don't they work for Islamic ideals and objectives? Similarly, a Christian with an exclusivist mentality asks himself such questions as, why are all people not Christians? Why don't others love Christ as the only savior and Lord? Why don't they see the meaning of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus? Why don't they take communion? Why don't they believe in the Bible?

A second approach can be illustrated by such expressions as, My religion is the only unique religion: other religions are eventually to accept this reality. Even though they may not be aware of this reality, they are followers of my religion anonymously. In this sense, for a Jew, Christians and Muslims are anonymous Jews; for a Christian, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims are anonymous Christians; and so forth. This position is called "inclusivism", but one might also call it a developed exclusivism.

The third approach to religious truth is called "pluralism". This position says that all religions are equally valid, equally true, equally right. Religions are ways or paths to the one reality. The same reality is manifested in different forms, in different formulas, in different rituals. Outward manifestations may differ, but in essence all are the same.

Salvation is possible for all. Each individual can find God/truth in his or her own tradition. No religion is superior to others. This pluralist approach is God/theo-centered.

The whole discussion of exclusivism, and pluralism emerges from the inevitable question of who is saved and how one is saved. Where is the truth? The moment one becomes religious one asks whether others are saved or not.

The list of strictly theological proposals for serious inter-religious dialogue is now at the point where it is difficult to understand how any serious theologian in any tradition can not accord the issue of religious pluralism a central role in his or her thinking.

2B.RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Plurality is a fact. There are religious and secular systems. Religions have sects, denominations, and cults. Secular systems also have such divisions. Divisions and subdivisions in religions and secular systems have a range of individuals. Some of these individuals are liberals, some conservatives, some fundamentalists. Individuals live a complex of seemingly conflicting attitudes within themselves. In sum, variation and diversity are facts.

There is every evidence that this diversity will be in the future too.

Any theology which overlooks this fact appears removed from the way and isolated.

Indeed, religious pluralism is an acknowledgement that truth is too great to grasp for a single person or for a single community. Traditions show the way to it, but individuals can reach it only partially. Although for us Muslims the Koran has all the truth in it, we Muslims are renowned for our emphasis on only certain aspects of the truth, such as responsibility and justice. While Jesus for Christians is the embodiment of truth on earth, Christians are famous for their stress on love. Jews are noted for their law, Hindus for their tolerance, and Buddhists for their enlightenment. We see a plurality of emphases on certain aspects of eternal truth, which transcends the monopoly of any particular group. Interdenominational plurality is no less pressing than interreligious or intercultural plurality. Groups continue to hold exclusivist and dogmatic positions and continue to damn the world outside themselves.

Almost no social scientists today can treat their subjects and reach their audiences without a comparative approach. If they want to be successful in their careers, theologians, preachers, imams, or teachers can hardly convey their message without appealing to similar or contrasting concepts in other traditions. This is because of recent developments in the modern audience, which is constantly being exposed to a world culture, and whose thought world is being formed by what they see, hear, read, and experience of other religions and cultures.

Religious scholarship of the last 100 years, together with rapid technological development and communication advances, have created an awareness of plurality in many a person. Huge accumulations of scholarly materials and face-to-face experiences have led many to think about this problem. Followers of each tradition have begun to see that other people do believe and act in similar manners. They are not as totally different as they thought themselves to be. Although one goes to a mosque, another to a church, another to a synagoge, and another to a temple; although one says Jesus is the master, another Allah is the Creator, another Yahweh is the Lord of Hosts, another Buddha is the Enlightened one; although one says love, the other says nothing but the truth, Allah, another says Karma; compassion, honesty, truthfulness, love, and generosity are shared by all. This awareness of similarity, together with the conclusion of religious scholarship that religions have visible and invisible aspects, that faith is not composed only of outward formulas and rituals, comes as a big challenge to the traditional truth claims arising from the time of cultural isolation.

2C. PLURALISM AND ISLAM

I purposely chose for the title "The Koran" instead of "Islam", for the term "Islam" at the hands of Muslims scholars has turned into a system. It was given an organized structure, an ideological character, and was equated with certain dogmas, formulas, and behaviors. The universal "Islam" of the Koran, which goes beyond history and transcends all particular religions, was replaced with a particular religion of a particular community. But the Koran as revelation remains. As the Koran states, no human hand touched it. Falsehood and error can never approach it, neither from the front nor from behind.²

The awareness of plurality among muslims is not new. The Koran powerfully informs us of this reality. "We made you nations and tribes so that you recognize one another." ³ Bagdadi and Shehrestani also were aware of this plurality. They quote the famous Hadith that Zo-

roastrians had 70 divisions, Jews had 71 divisions, Christians 72, and Muslims 73. Living aside the discussion of the authenticity of this hadith, we see in it the consciousness of plurality. But it is interesting that Bagdadi sent all Zoroastrians, all Jews, all Christians, and even 72 of the Muslim divisions to hell; the one exception was the sect to which he belonged, the "Firqat an-Najiya" (The Group of the Saved). Indeed, it was and is hard to prevent variations among Muslims and within every tradition. Any course in the history of religions makes this clear. Given the facts of plurality and of ongoing variation, it becomes a pressing problem for us as Muslims, as for all religious people, to deal with this plurality.

The point here is whether we as Muslims can or are allowed to think or act along pluralistic lines. Would such an approach be un-Islamic? Would such an inclination deprive us of our Islamic identity? Can a Muslim think that a Jew, and Christian, a Hindu, or a secular humanist attain Allah's "Rahma", without changing his or her orientation? Can a Muslim think that Allah in His infinite mercy and grace loves and has mercy upon all of His creatures without regard to their religious orientations? Can we think of Allah as the Allah of all mankind who does not discriminate among His creatures? Can we recognise religions as valid paths to truth?

These and other questions cannot be taken separately from our self-understanding. Do we see ourselves equal to others, or do we see ourselves superior to others? Where does this superiority come from? Can we justify our history? Can our history be justified on the basis of the Koran? Does the Koran give room to the development of new theologies and new patterns of behavior? Can one claim that the historical interpretation of the Koranic revelation is the only true and valid interpretation?

3A. CLASSICAL ATTITUDES

When evaluating our past experience, it is acknowledged that our ancestors developed a noble and progressive attitude toward followers of other religions who lived under their rule. This is acknowledged today by outsiders as well. Muslims are proud of this tolerance shown to others.

Yet in acknowledging the tolerance I see a tendency in us to glorify our past. Yes, our ancestors treated others nobly, especially when compared to other civilizations. But let us not forget that this noble treat-

ment included only those who accepted Islamic authority.

The majority outside the Dar el-Islam were still targets of the sword. The tendency to glorify the Islamic tolerance found in the past now becomes a barrier which prevents us from transforming ourselves and seeing the truth. I suggest that we must be able to see our faults as well.

The historical consciousness has been that when Islam came, all previous religions were abrogated. The principle was, "Truth has come and falsehood is banished". (1) They looked at Islam and other religions from this angle. All religions were simply ignored. Islam was viewed as a supercessionist religion. The Koran had replaced its predecessors, the Islamic Sharia (law) had abrogated previous shariats, and Islam had come so that all other religions were no longer valid. They had no truth in them any more.

We need not deny that Koranic revelation was interpreted in supercessionist, triumphalist, and completionalist lines. Islam was understood as a religion of power, authority, conquest, and victory.

It seems an undeniable fact that our ancestors felt themselves superior to others. They formulated their theology in accordance with a psychology of superiority. They based their theology on the belief that they were right and others were wrong, that Allah was with them. They ignored the religion of others except for polemical purposes. They felt they were the only true believers. They identified faith with themselves only. Their theology was similar in attitude to that of Jewish chosenness and Christian exclusivism against which the Koran fought.

Historical Islam has classified the whole world into two main divisions: namely, the Domain of Islam (Dar el-Islam), in the sense of the abode or house of faith, goodness, peace, security, and prosperity; and the Dar el-Kufr, or Dar el-Harb, which means the house or abode of unbelief, evil, insecurity, "fitna", violence, and wickedness. According to such a classification of humanity as the basis of religion, it seemed that any who failed to accept Islam as his or her religion would have been asked to give the "Jizya" (tax on non-Muslims); if the jizya was not given, he or she would face the sword. Within such a classification of humanity, those who were born into the Dar el-Kufr/Harb had a chance to live insofar as they chose to live in the Dar el-Islam either as a Muslim or as a citizen paying the jizya to the Islamic state; or else they would automatically and potentially be considered the potential enemies of

Islam and defeated. Anyone who refused the authority of Islam would be defeated. The authority of Islam required full obedience to the laws of Islam (Sharia). It required seeing the authority of the world of Allah as superior.

3B. THE OLD THEOLOGY

The question before us is whether we are obliged to accept such historical formulations as the only valid formulations that can ever be taken from the Koran. Are Muslims of all times obliged to take the historical theological formulations as the only valid ways of understanding the Koran? Will this position not restrict the divine word to a particular understanding of a particular people of a particular time?

If we continue to deify historical theology, then let all be prepared to see how it is becoming out of date, incompatible with modernity, non-harmonious with development, insensitive to human affairs, reactionary, and incapable of meeting the needs of the day.

It is my suggestion to make a sharp distinction between what is divine and what is human; what is of Allah and what is of Muslims; what is transcendent and what is historical; what is absolute and what is relative.

CHAPTER 4 THE KORAN

4A. WHAT IS THE KORAN?

As we know, the Koran is the sacred book of Islam. It is a direct revelation from Allah. It is the truth itself for us Muslims. No error finds its way into it. I would argue that very few study this book systematically and analytically.

The Koran is to its followers the word of Allah. It is a direct revelation of the divine truth to the heart of the Prophet. It has no human element in it. It is thoroughly divine, thoroughly real, thoroughly true.

The Koran seems to have lasting effects on us Muslims, yet our understandings of it have throughout history been subject to changes. The divine word of God, the Koran, is to us Muslims the truth and the criterion of truth itself. But the limited understandings of us humans seem to be subject to alterations and progress all of the time. One can apply this generalization to almost all aspects of Islamic thought and action. And the topic that we will be dealing with now is not an exception to that generalization.

4B. THE SPIRIT OF THE KORAN

The general spirit of the Koran:

- No coercion in matters of faith ¹
- Allah is the Lord of all; ²
- Allah's mercy is not limited to any particular person, race, nation, or religion; ³
- invitation, not imposition; ⁴
- participation and peaceful competition in Hayrat; ⁵
- dialogue; ⁶
- dignity of human beings; ⁷
- the oneness of humanity in the person of Adam; ⁸
- the oneness of revelation: that Allah did not leave an umma without a prophet; that all scriptures are from Allah; ⁹
- absolute claims are not acceptable but absolute truth is with Allah; ¹⁰
- reasonableness; ¹¹
- tolerance; ¹²

- the justice of God; the negation of "zulm" (oppression); 13
- cooperation of "birr", and "taqwa" (ethical righteousness); 14
- humility; anti-pride; 15
- anti-tolerance; anti-fanaticism; 16
- no limit to learning; 17
- submission to Allah's will; selflessness. 18

We are convinced that the Koran in its totality allows freedom to choose and acknowledges human dignity and responsibility. Individuals have nothing to say to other individuals concerning their choices. And judgement is left to God. But individuals are given the right to dialogue in a free spirit.

4C. KORANIC INTERPRETATION

Our view of others has close connections with almost all aspects of Koranic revelation. It has things to do with our view of Allah, prophethood, scripture, justice, the hereafter, humanity, Islam, "iman" (faith), "kufr" (unbelief), sin, "din" (religion), "jihad" (holy/just war), and mission. What kind of god do we believe in? What is our conception of prophethood, of scriptures (the Koran and others), of "tahrif", of eschatology, of Islam (both universal and particular), and of "iman" (faith) (both individual and communal)?

It seems that the Koran has so far been explained, understood, and interpreted in communal, particular, and national terms. The context in which the Koran spoke, as well as subsequent contexts, made it a necessity. But the context has long since changed. The emphasis is no longer on the nation or community but on the individual. It is no longer the sole community one is born into exclusively that determines one's salvation or destiny but the individual self who makes his own choices to a great extent on matters concerning his fate. People are no longer willing to live fighting but want to live in peace and cooperation. People are no longer satisfied with living in isolation from the rest of the world but want to establish international relations. People have begun to think that they are not the property only of their own nation but also of the world at large. Therefore, the Koran needs to be reinterpreted along such lines.

It appears that we need a new approach to the language of the Koran and to its terminology. We need to isolate such terms as "kafir/mushrik/munafik" (unbeliever/idolator/hypocrite) from the later the-

ological accretions that they acquired. This seems necessary to bring the Koran to our day to make it speak to our time.

We need to approach such verses concerning jihad under the light of historical context and abrogation. We need to separate what is provisional from what is permanent in it.

What many Muslims know of the content of the Koran is not first-hand information. Rather, it is second or third-hand information. Many look into it through the eyes of very few people. We are looking at the Koran through the glasses of some human beings like ourselves. Such people are subject to error, prejudices, limitations, intolerance, pride, cultural bias, social and political pressures, others' expectations of them, responsibilities, and psychological, social, and economic tensions. In other words, we allow some people to shape our ideas, beliefs, systems, and ideals with their own ideas, beliefs, systems, and ideals. Not the Koran but some people's understanding of the Koran shapes and conditions us, our thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles.

Now let us turn to the history of Muslim thought. Who ruled and who rules our Muslim minds? Are they other than a few scholars and theologians who lived within the particular environment of a particular time and history? Were they not part and product of their particular society and culture? Did they not live under particular economic, political, and cultural circumstances? Was not these people's understanding of the Koran shaped by their own context? Are not these the people who have been shaping our thinking and worldview?

Are we not taking their problems and their reactions to their problems as our own problems and our own reactions? Are not the conflicts and controversies and disputes which took place between them and their opponents our own controversies and conflicts and disputes? For example, of what relevance is it today to side with either Ali or with Muaviya, or with their children or their children's children, in their competition for leadership? Yet this seems to be the reason for the greatest split in the Muslim community, a division which has taken tens of thousands of lives in the past and continues in bloodshed today. In sum, are we not allowing history to rule over our time? How many of us today dare look at this history with a critical eye? How many of us have the courage to touch the Koran without mediation? Is it not a taboo for many to approach the Koran to find answers to problems? It is my conviction that it is a characteristic of backwardness or underdevelopment or whatever we name it to allow the past to shape, rule,

guide, dictate or direct us uncritically. To surrender the predecessors without criticism is to allow ourselves to deny the creativity that God gave us.

The Koran offers paradoxical attitudes concerning basic human problems such as freedom, predestination, justification by faith or deed, salvation, God's unity, God's attributes, God's visibility, "iman" (faith), Islam, sin, "kufr", "kada", "kader", "rizk", leadership, "ejel", and so on. All of these terms occur in the Koran and Muslim scholars are not unified on their meanings.

The Koran deals with the basic questions of humanity which cause a range of understandings and interpretations. The Koran treats, fate, destiny, free will, the nature of the human being, sin, actions, justice, and all basic questions of theology (the nature of God, predestination, good and evil, guidance, heresy, free will, and so forth) in a way which allows variation and diversity. In this sense it is unlike any theology book. It is not dogmatic. It does not limit itself. This is the divine character in it. This way of handling these basic issues implies that humanity can never reach absolute knowledge, that humankind is destined to live by limited knowledge, that people can never come to a point where they deserve pride. The differences of opinions among the early "ulema" (scholars) is evidence that Muslims have no unified or uniform understanding of the Koran in terms of even the most crucial problems of humanity. In fact, the nature of the Koran does not allow uniformity but plurality, or unity in plurality. The Koran's position toward religions is not an exception to this.

The Koran has two types of verses. One type of verse gives a pluralistic view of religions ¹⁹, considering all religions as one in substance, which is submission to Allah and doing good works for others. Another type of verse gives a particularistic view of religions ²⁰ accepting Islam and rejecting other religions. The Koran's view of religions can be reached when these two types of verses are discussed and treated. The verses which give a particularistic view of religion do not criticise others from the point of view of their doctrines but with regard to their followers' acts and attitudes.

It is my understanding of the Koran that it has no absolutist, ideological positions. It has no teaching toward total acceptance nor total rejection, but observes justice.

The Koran teaches a plurality of positions toward People of the

Book. Some verses encourage dialogue with them. Some teach how to deal with them. Some verses of the Koran consider Jews and Christians as "kafirs" (unbelievers). Some verses consider them "mumins" (believers). Some verses are severer to Jews but milder to Christians. Some verses give validity to all religions, giving them equal chances to exist side by side with Islam. Some verses reject them all. Some verses encourage sharing with Jews and Christians and some discourage being friends with them. The Koran gives so much room for the treatment of others. One can say that this shows that the Koran takes religions most seriously. Indeed, the Koran's self-understanding is based mainly on its treatment of others.

"Nusus" (texts) are one thing; their formulation is another.

Nusus remain unsystematized. But humans and theologians systemize them. Theologians put nusus in a theological, systemized formulation. Theologians develop theories based on nusus. All of these theories, theologies, and systems are the result of efforts to understand, to make intelligible the seemingly contradictory and paradoxical nusus. Humans tend to think in a systemic way. They tend to create dogmas. They tend to create structures. They tend by nature to reach absolutes. This leads them to find an explanation to everything in a logical order. In doing this they usually tend to forget or ignore the cosmic logic of the nusus. Indeed, this is an escape from relativism.

The subject matter of our old "kelam" (theology) is indeed an ontology of interpretations and controversies of Muslim scholars concerning basic human problems. Scholars did try to explain those basic issues under the light of the nusus and the events they experienced. They took the event and referred it to related verses in the Koran and in the hadith. Mostly they made choices among the nusus. They chose some and compromised others. They tried to justify their political and religious orientations on the basis of the Koran and Hadith. But the divine character of the Koran gave neither full support nor full denial to any particular position of theirs or to any particular theological formulation, for the Koran provided bases for different theological views. This is why we had so many opposing views, theories and theologies concerning the basic problems of humanity. This is why we have had, and continue to have, so many sects and schools of thought.

If we continue to see the Koran as a rigid, frozen system and try to apply literally in all ages of history, or try to take a particular understanding of it and apply that understanding to all situations, both

present and historical, without considering the context, then we will see or make the Koran incapable of meeting the demands of the time.

4D. THE KORAN AND PLURALISM

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Koran's major message is to end all sources and dimensions of exclusivism and to establish equality on earth. It came as a guarantor of religious freedom in its plurality. The Koran denied humans the authority to judge one another on God's behalf. Allah speaks to us, makes promises, and warns us out of His infinite wisdom, power, and mercy. But who are we to judge one another on Allah's behalf? It is our contention that the message of the Koran lies here: to liberate God from human control; to take back from humans the authority to judge one another in the name of God; and to tell us that absolutism is not fitting for humankind. And herein lies the error of all the absolute claims of all religions and philosophies. Can the Koran cherish exclusivism while it preaches such tolerance? Yet one is perplexed to see Muslims dividing humanity interreligiously and interdenominationally into "we" and "they".

The Koran tells us that religious diversity is the will of God.

The fact that the Koran gives so much space for interreligious communication and discussion is itself a sign that the Koran took plurality seriously; Abrahamic, Jewish, and Christian-Biblical traditions occupy a large part of the Koran. Therefore, followers of the Koran must take all religions seriously; for religions are most important for humanity.

The Koran provides one with a good foundation for a comparative study of religions. There are ample data in it for understanding the nature and character of "din" (religion), "iman" (faith), Islam, and other monotheistic religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity. It has norms of justification of true religion with God, and faith criteria for how to deal with the views of one another.

I want to argue that the Koran in its entirety is favorable to a pluralistic approach. The Koran warns the prophet not to try to make everyone a Muslim, not to try to give uniformity to the world. The Koran says it was in Allah's power to make all nations one nation. But it was not Allah's will to do so.²¹ It is this very Koranic statement that is the truth, which solves the whole problem, which explains the ongoing complexity and variation of the world. The Koran wanted all to be as they are but to compete in goodness. Pluralism was taken for granted by

this verse.

The scriptures shows that even the Prophet himself sometimes showed an inclination to exclusivist views, but the Koran warned him and pulled him back to the pluralistic line. ²²

The prohibition against taking friends or protectors from among the people of the Book and "mushrik"s (idolators) ²³ is not a general or an absolute one. First, other verses allow the taking of friends and protectors from such people, if they are not violent and aggressive toward Muslims and if they keep their word. Second, the situations to which such verses speak are temporary or provisional. Such verses appear in a context of "jihad" (holy/just war):

"who take your religion for a mockery or sport" ²⁴

"(who cause) tumult or oppression" ²⁵

"for their oaths are nothing to them" ²⁶

"my enemies and yours" ²⁷

"...hypocrites..." ²⁸

"...nor will they cease fighting you until they turn..." ²⁹

I am inclined to see verses that seem to imply exclusivism not as a basis for total discrimination and division but as invitations or notices to correct and transform. Such verses do not call one to a dogmatic, permanent discrimination or division among religions and humankind. Rather they call attention to the need for growing, for correction, and for transformation. "They are dirty ('najas')", "do not take them as friends", "fight them", and such words speak to the danger or evil of certain acts by people who need transformation. I prefer to take such phrases in the following way: "they are 'najas' so long as they continue in the 'shirk' (idolatry)", which in the Koran is identical with violence, ignorance, aggression, injustice, and terror. Or "do not take them as friends as long as they hold on to their animosity, hatred, and jealousy toward Muslims". And "fight them as long as they fight you intending to kill you simply because you are not a Jew or Christian". I tend to understand such verses which apparently imply an anti-pluralistic attitude not as the bases for a dogmatic and permanent division or discrimination among religions and humankind but more as illustrations of the acts, attitudes, and positions which need transformation. For in other verses the fundamentals of a single and undivided humanity is established, so that people of other religions are recognized in their right to

exist.

The old interpretation is as follows: "Those who believed and those who were once Jews or Christians or Sabians...".³⁰ This is nonsense, for if the Koran were to call believers according to their former religious orientations, even after they had become Muslims, then the title "believers" ("innellezine amenu") in the beginning of the verse would have been better replaced by "innellezine kafaru" or "innellezine eshreku vellezina hadu ve'nnasara man amane billahi..." The meaning would then be, "those who were once in "kufr", those who were once in shirk" (of the Arabs), those who were once Jews and those who were once Christians and those who were something else and others who ever believe in Allah..." We tend to translate or understand the "innellezina amanu" as "those who are Muslims and Jews and Christians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good: their reward will be considered..." Thus,

"Believers (in the Prophet and in his Sharia, namely Muhammad's own community of believers; that is, Muslims) and Jews and Christians and Sabeans and others, any who believe in Allah (God) and the hereafter and do good works: their reward will be with Allah and they will not be grieved."

The following points arise in the analysis of this verse.

1. It is interesting that the requirements of faith among all religions are such universal elements as belief in Allah and in the hereafter and in doing good works. As long as these three exist in any religion, such religion is recognized as a true, valid religion and a way of salvation.

2. The Koran establishes criteria for salvation: namely, belief in Allah and in the hereafter, and doing good works. The "hereafter" stands for final judgement, an event which will come as the realization of full justice. It stands for eternity. And according to this verse such criteria are to be applied equally to believers (in Muhammad or Muhammad's own community) and to Jews..

3. The old interpretation that any who enter "iman" (faith) by denying their Judaism or Christianity or Sabeanism seems forced, for such a meaning would be the translation of "innellezina amanu vellezina kanu hudan." But the verse is entirely different.

4. It is also interesting that as far as the universal Islam or universal requirements of salvation are concerned, belief in Muhammad

is excluded.

5. It is interesting that the first "amanu" refers to Muslims, the particular Muslim community, with Muhammad as its leader, while the second "Men amene" refers to the universal Islam which includes all communities.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

6A TOWARD A NEW THEOLOGY

Such an approach to Allah, to revelation, and to humanity has many important implications. Such a viewpoint would put most of our history to the test. Such an approach to "iman" and to Islam would require branches of Islamic scholarship to be reconsidered and reconstructed. This means that the Koran must be understood anew, that the Koran must be reinterpreted, that the experiences of our prophet be re-examined, that our relations with others be reviewed, and that our denominational responsibilities be reformed. Many of us, including myself, will be shaken and become restless for a time. But there seems to be no other way if we would make the Koran speak to the world of today.

6b. SUGGESTIONS

There are many deep misunderstandings and prejudices between the followers of religions such that real peace cannot come about until those misunderstandings are replaced by correct views of one another and until those prejudices are replaced by truth. However, misunderstandings stem first of all from our understandings of our own traditions. Misunderstandings come from and are supported by our concept of God, humanity, truth, the world, salvation, and other peoples. Misunderstandings are of two kinds: first, our misunderstandings of our own traditions; second, our misunderstandings of others' traditions.

Real peace and a sincere desire for truth can only come when all sides are thoroughly open, thoroughly honest, and thoroughly sincere. In the process of peace, each side needs to talk not of how much each was correct, right, and good, but more of how each side was mistaken, faulty, and not really understanding the other sides. Self-criticism should be sharper than criticism of others. Salvation is the result of repentance. Unless human pride is overcome, unless humans become humble before God, unless humans express their fallibility, limitations, and errors, they cannot grow, correct themselves, and develop. So it is when conflicting sides come together to make peace. I remember when I was a school student. I would approach a friend who might be up-

set with me for whatever reason. I said how I was sorry that I did this or that. Then he would respond. The humbler one, the one who takes the first step, the one who is ready for criticism, is more beloved to God.

I see now that the sides are getting prepared to talk for peace. Yet I see each side talking about its own successes and goodness. I think this is not Islamic. If we all were good then why do we have such a sad history? Let us be honest and not be afraid to mention our mistakes for the sake of truth. I see Muslims talking about how tolerant they have been in their history. They mention all of the verses which give a positive image. Yet they hide the other side. Let us be prepared to discuss both sides of our respective theologies and histories.

Foot-notes

Chapter Two: PLURALISM

1. John Hick, Problems of Religions Pluralism, New York 1985.P.36.

2. Goran, 41/42

3. Ibid., 17/81

Chapter Three: CLASSICAL ATTITUDES

1. Goran, 17/81

Chapter Four: THE GORAN

1. Goran, 10/99

2. Ibid., 2/139

3. Ibid., 3/115; 4/124; 5/57; 10/107

4. Ibid., 5/99

5. Ibid., 2/148

6. Ibid., 3/64

7. Ibid., 17/70

8. Ibid., 4/1; 32/52, 53

9. Ibid., 2/136

10. Ibid., 2/111, 135; 5/19

11. Ibid., 43/22; 46/11

12. Ibid., 2/109; 5/13

13. Ibid., 4/58; 5/8; 16/90

14. Ibid., 2/45; 5/2

15. Ibid., 17/37

16. Ibid., 10/99

17. Ibid., 39/9

18. Ibid., 2/128, 136

19. Ibid., 2/82, 148; 4/88; 5/47, 49, 51, 71; 6/108; 10/19, 41, 47; 11/118, 119; 16/93; 17/108, 110; 18/29; 21/92, 94; 22/17, 18, 34, 40, 67, 68, 69; 23/52, 53; 28/56; 40/53, 54; 42/

- 8,15;45/28;46/12,13;49/13;57/26,27;60/8;61/14;95/4;98/5-7;109/6
20. Ibid.,2/190,191,193,194,221;3/28,110;4/48,80,89,144;5/3,17,54,57,60;6/125;7/
157,158;8/7,8,39;9/12,28,29,36,73;33/1;48/28,29;49/14;60/1;98/5,7
21. Ibid.,5/48
22. Ibid.,5/9;10/99
23. Ibid.,6/8
24. Ibid.,5/60
25. Ibid.,60/1,2
26. Ibid.,9/12
27. Ibid., 60/1
28. Ibid.,9/67
29. Ibid.,2/217
30. Ibid.,2/62;5/69;22/17